There's no shame in admitting that boys and girls are different

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OPINION

KATHLEEN PARKER

Orlando Sentinel columnist

If I were Harvard President Lawrence Summers — given Womanhood's reaction to his suggestion that innate gender differences might account for men's higher achievement in math and science — I'd be sorely tempted at this point to say: "I rest my case."

Instead, despite having apologized for speaking an unpopular truth, Summers will be the subject of an emergency faculty meeting scheduled Tuesday at which Harvard professors will discuss: What to do about Larry?

The past few weeks following Summers' blasphemous remarks at an economics conference have been embarrassing for some of us gals. Maybe I spend too much time with men, but I'm finding the fair sex to be most *un*fair and somewhat short-staffed in the logic and reason departments.

What Summers said, in terms that left a reasonable amount of wiggle room for reasonable people, happens to be factually, biologically, chemically, genetically, anecdotally and historiagraphically true. Even if it makes some tortured academics reach for the fainting couch.

He did not say that women are dumb, as some claimed in the immediate aftermath. He merely said that, given the many possible explanations for why men as a group actually do perform better than women as a group — consistently testing better in those areas — that biological differences might be worth considering.

Heresy.

The truth is, Summers' suggestion is neither radical nor provocative. It's old news that boys do better than girls in math and science, and that girls do better in the reading and areas requiring verbal skills. Yet, you don't see men lurching for smelling salts when they hear this. Instead, they stroke their chins and say, "Hmmm, maybe I need a new razor."

Why can't women do that? Why not respond without emotion, grab a government grant and explore methods of teaching science and mathematics in ways that females learn best? Instead, some women have reacted as though their corsets were too tight. Male chauvinist pigs (remember them?) can take a vacation as long as women like MIT biology professor Nancy Hopkins are defending women's intellect. Upon hearing Summers' words, Hopkins told reporters that she felt she was going to be sick. That her "heart was pounding" and her "breath was shallow . . . I just couldn't breathe."

Rhett, oh Rhett, get that woman a julep, for cryin' out loud.

As nursemaids and parents of real children have always known, boys and girls are different, including their wiring and the way they learn and process information. There is, moreover, a growing body of scientific evidence that girls and boys have different aptitudes based on brain-based gender differences.

Boys are better at spatial skills and abstract cognition, which gives them an advantage in math. Their brains also make them adept at working with lists, giving them an advantage on multiple-choice questions and possibly explaining why they tend to score slightly better than girls on standardized tests.

This gap has narrowed in recent years as tests have begun to include more essay-style questions, at which girls tend to do better. Otherwise, girls are far exceeding boys in school at nearly every level. Sixty percent of college students today are female. At the high school level, girls receive 60 percent of the A's, while boys earn 70 percent of the D's and F's, according to Michael Gurian, author of "Boys and Girls Learn Differently."

Gurian, an educator and therapist, argues that some boy-girl differences won't ever change owing to brain-based causes.

The larger, more compelling concern to educators would seem to be helping boys improve their reading and writing skills so that they can survive in the information age, rather than counting the number of female Ph.D.s in science as some measure of gender equality.

Meanwhile, it's too bad Summers felt forced to apologize and that he faces further censure from faculty. When the president of the nation's oldest university has to say he's sorry for saying something true, the opposite of truth seems the victor.

Write to Parker at kparker@kparker.com.

husband, Steve Lewis of Colorado Springs; grandchildren: Jeffrey and Jenna Lewis (both of Colorado Springs), Sara Spink of Des Moines, Iowa, and Torrey Spink of Pasadena, California; and

Tuesday, February 22, 2005. Private services will be held on February 23, 2005.

Dignity Memorial
Swan-Law Funeral Directors
501 N. Cascade Avenue
719-471-9900 www.mem.com

CLIFFORD WHITTER SUNDBERG

Mr. Sundberg deceased on February 12, 2005 after a long illness of lung disease and more recently, cancer. Mr. Sundberg was born on August 30th, 1943 in Boston MA. He was the son of Clifford Stanley Sundberg and Dorothy Whittier Sundberg.

Mr. Sundberg graduated from Winchester High School, Winchester, MA. He earned his Bachelor's degree in Economics from the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. He earned his Masters in Business from the University of Maine, Portland. Mr. Sundberg also attended Northeastern University and University of Colorado, Colorado Springs. He also taught at various community colleges in the Boston area before relocating to Colorado Springs.

As an Eagle Scout at the age of 15 years, he was awarded the Silver Cluster while with Troop 3, Winchester, MA.

During his career, Mr. Sundberg was a pioneer in computer software and design analysis and worked for various consulting firms. During his career he was employed by: Union Mutual Ins. Co., United Brands, digital Equipment and MCI.

Mr. Sundberg served in the United States Air Force from June 1965 to April 1969. He was a veteran of the Vietnam War.

Mr. Sundberg enjoyed the great outdoors including: backpacking and horse back riding. He also enjoyed woodworking, reading and writing literature.

Mr. Sundberg was very interested in the preservation of nature and a great supporter and contributor of the American Indian cultures and society.

Mr. Sundberg is survived by his former wife and very dear friend, Norma Lea Sundberg; sister, Carole Lynn and husband, Arthur Alton; brother, Stephen Forest Sundberg; three nieces; and two nephews; two grandnephews; and his dear friend, Mr. Stump.

Contributions in his memory may be sent to the Pikes Peak Hospice, 825 E. Pikes Peak Ave. Suite 600, Colorado Springs, CO 80903 or charity of your choice.

ELLA WOOLSEY

Ella Emilie Woolsey, 83, loved by family, friends and neighbors, passed away on Thursday, February 17, 2005 at Pikes Peak Hospice. Ella's warm smile and caring ways

assistance from the Home Instead Senior Care. She moved to assisted living at Bee Hive Homes, where she made new friends, enjoyed many activities, and loved her room. She then moved to the caring nurses of

rest on February 17, 2005. He and his wife Matyleen loved to ride motorcycles. John was a great mechanic, and enjoyed helping friends and family with their car troubles. A favorite past time was target practice shooting. He especially liked to hunt for pheasant.

John is survived by his wife, Matyleen Cooper; brothers: Paul (Naomi) Cooper of Madison, TN, David (Pat) Fred (Kim) O'Neil of Myrt MO; his sisters: Ma (Norman) Van Arsdale of Re City, MI, Lydia Vestal of S Louis, MO, and Bridget (Ray) Dern of Koshkonon MO. John was preceded i death by one sister, Sara Rice.

Dignity Memorial
Memorial Gardens
Cemetery & Funeral Home
3825 Airport Road
www.dignitymemorial.com

FERMA BELLE SMITH

Ferma Smith

Ferma Belle Smith, loving wife of Merlyn Smith and friend to many, passed away after a short illness on Monday, February 14, 2005 at Pikes Peak Hospice.

Ferma was born and grew up in the small town of Missouri Valley in Iowa and experienced the time of the Great Depression in full brunt. After graduating from High School Ferma left Iowa and ventured to Omaha, Nebraska, to work for the Northwest Telephone Company were she met her first husband, Earl Leroy Ward.

From her first marriage Ferma is survived by three step grandchildren: Steven and Jeffrey Ward; and Jennifer Kistler. Some time after her first husband's sudden and unexpected death, she married Merlyn D. Smith and they resided in Colorado Springs for all of their 51 years of marriage.

Ferma and Merlyn were avid travelers and accumulated many memories by visiting almost all of Europe, as well as Australia, Africa, South America and Mexico.

From 1959 through 1984, Ferma was her husband's very active partner in their insurance business. Ferma had a great sense of humor and loved to socialize. Always proud of her neat appearance, for almost 30 years she never missed her Friday beauty shop appointment and the chance to visit with fellow customers.

During World War II, Ferma served proudly as a Wave in the Navy and had many stories to tell about that time. She als volunteered her time a the Namaste Facilities, was a Gir Scout leader, President of the Veterans of Retired Waves Organization, and a member of the First United Methodist Church.

Ferma lived a full life, always considerate of her fellow human beings, was an excellent business woman and valued honesty above all. She will be missed by her surviving friends and family.

It was Ferma's wish that she'd be cremated and that there would be no services.